Rev. Mr. Burton's

ELECTION SERMON.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE

His Excellency THOMAS CHITTENDEN,

ESQUIRE, GOVERNOR,

The Honourable COUNCIL,

AND

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

OF THE

STATE OF VERMONT:

AT WINDSOR, OCTOBER 8th, 1795.

BEING THE DAY OF

General Election.

BY ASA BURTON, A. M.

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THETFORD.

RUTLAND:

PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE LEGISLATURE.

M, DCC, XCV.

STATE OF VERMONT.

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 9th October, 1795.

ON MOTION,

RESOLVED,

THAT JONATHAN ROBINSON, Esq. Dr. ELDERKIN, and Col. SHELDON, be a Committee to wait on the Rev. ASA BURTON, return him the thanks of this House, for the Sermon by him delivered on Election Day, and request a Copy for the Press.

Extract from the Journals.

(Attest,)

R. WHITNEY, *Clerk.*

A N

ELECTION SERMON.

PSALMS, VIII. 5.

For thou haſt made him a little lower than the angels.

PHILOSOPHERS, for the purpoſe of reaſoning and communicating their ideas to better advantage, have divided all exiſtences into claſſes. Theſe diviſions are denominated by ſuch general terms, as a genus, ſpecies, order, and rank of beings. Matter is a general term, including all the ideas, which belong, in common, to all material exiſtences. They then ſubdivide material exiſtence into ſeveral ſpecies. Inanimate exiſtence conſtitutes one, vegetable another, and animals a third ſpecies, riſing, by way of gradation, from the loweſt to the higheſt in kind. Spirit is alſo a general common name of all ſpiritual beings, which, however, are divided into different claſſes, as divine,

divine, angelic, and human. The ſoul is a ſpiritual exiſtence; men, therefore, form one, and the angels another and higher rank. Whatever the ſpecific difference between angels and men may be, the text places us as but little below them, and at the head of all other creatures in this world. Man is made, (for he is the perſon meant in the text,) a *little lower* than the angels. Indeed, the analogy obſervable in all the works of God, together with the text, afford us reaſons to believe, that the angels riſe in different ranks one above another, till at laſt the Almighty appears infinitely above the whole, as the ſuperior head of all principality and power, or of all ranks in the univerſe.

ALL beings rank according to their real dignity and worth. Different orders of creatures ought, therefore, to riſe, by eaſy gradations, men above animals, and angels above men, in proportion to their different degrees of real dignity and value. By the ſame rule, all the ſtates and kingdoms of the earth ought to rank themſelves. And all beings ought to employ all their powers agreeably to, and uniformly in, the ſtations aſſigned them, by the Author of their exiſtence.

ASCERTAINING clearly the real value of things in general, and of thoſe properties in particular which are the moſt valuable, will teach men their real worth, and the rank they ſuſtain, and prepare the way to ſhow how the improvement

improvement of the mind will contribute to the good of ſociety.

LET it then be ſhewn,

I. WHAT conſtitutes the real worth of beings in general.

THE value of all things is either *intrinſic* or *relative*. The reaſon why any thing is eſteemed, is, on account of the immediate pleaſure which it affords, and the happineſs it may hereafter produce. As all happineſs preſuppoſes a pleaſing object, thoſe which ſuit the reliſh of the mind may be termed the *ſources* of happineſs. Thoſe things then, which, of themſelves, afford immediate pleaſure, have intrinſic value; but thoſe things which pleaſe only when viewed as neceſſary means to happineſs hereafter, have a relative value. Hence, ſome kinds of fruit are valued on account of the immediate pleaſure which they afford, and alſo, for the ſake of ſome future good to which they are a neceſſary mean, by reſtoring health, nouriſhing the body, and procuring other things of higher gratification. There are ſome things, which, in themſelves, afford no ſatisfaction; theſe are valued only as means to happineſs hereafter. It is in this relative view that money is ſo highly eſteemed; becauſe it ſerves as a mean to procure moſt of the ſources of happineſs in the preſent life. Hence, ſome things have only

only a relative, and others have both a relative and an intrinſic value.

FURTHERMORE, although ſome things give immediate gratification, yet, if they will hereafter deſtroy our happineſs, they are not on the whole valuable. Hence, thoſe things only will be eſteemed by any perſon on the whole as valuable, which give him more pleaſure than pain. And thoſe things only which on the whole produce more good than evil, ought to be eſteemed by us as being really valuable to ſociety. And by the ſame rule, in eſtimating the worth of things, we ought not to conſider any thing as valuable on the whole, only that which will finally and forever iſſue in the higheſt happineſs of the univerſe. As all perſons ought to ſeek the good of ſociety, ſo all ſocieties ought to ſeek the good of the univerſe: And as the good of each of theſe is inſeparably connected, every perſon by ſeeking the high[illegible] good of the one, promotes the higheſt good o[illegible]e other. Hence, the higheſt good or happineſs of the moral ſyſtem, is the *ſtandard* by which we are to eſtimate the worth of every thing. According to this ſtandard, the following are the only reaſons why any exiſtences, with their properties, are valuable. (1.) Becauſe ſome of them are capable of enjoying the higheſt good. A capacity to enjoy good is valuable on this very account. Veſſels in daily uſe, are eſteemed on account of what they receive

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and contain. In this view, the worth of any being is great, in proportion to the ſum of happineſs he is capable of enjoying during his exiſtence. (2.) Becauſe they are a means of the increaſe and diffuſion of happineſs. An exiſtence is valuable, if it is a means of promoting, although it is not capable of enjoying happineſs. In this view, the intrinſic and relative value of all things is greater or leſs, in proportion as they promote the higheſt good of the moral ſyſtem. Hence, thoſe things which ſerve as means to happineſs, without any capacity to enjoy it, have not that degree of worth thoſe beings have who are capable both of enjoying and increaſing it.

THIS leads me to inquire,

II. WHAT thoſe faculties or properties in any being are, in particular, which are the moſt valuable?

THE ſoul of man is a ray from the Eternal Source of intelligence; and, like its author, is compoſed of three general faculties, *underſtanding*, *taſte*, and *will*.

THE underſtanding is the receptacle of ideas; that faculty which perceives truth and falſehood, right and wrong, and is the ſeat of every rational proceſs and operation. It is the light of the ſoul, the candle of the Lord ſhining in every man, to direct him in the way to true happineſs and glory. It is neceſ-

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ſary to the exiſtence of happineſs, and capable of endleſs growth and improvement in knowedge.

The faculty of taſte is the ſeat of all our pleaſures and pains. If man were deſtitute of this, or of feeling, he would no more be the ſubject of happineſs, or of miſery, than the inanimate creation.—This is one property of our nature, by which we are diſtinguiſhed from, and exalted above, the lower orders of exiſtence. This faculty is, alſo, capable of improvement in refinement, in delicacy, and ſenſibility; and hereby of deriving more ſatisfaction from all the ſources of happineſs around us. Of theſe ſources, ſome are ſhort in their duration, and others are eternal. If the reliſh of the mind is ſuch as to be pleaſed with the former only, we are not prepared for endleſs happineſs; becauſe, in this caſe, our preſent happineſs will terminate when theſe temporal, and fading ſources have an end. And thoſe ſources which will continue, and afford delight to a good taſte, will be ſources of miſery to a bad one. Hence, according to the nature of our taſte, we are prepared to experience, either happineſs, or miſery, forever. This ſhows how important it is, that the taſte ſhould be rectified and improved; and ſhows, that its eternal growth lays a foundation for endleſs increaſing happineſs.

The will is the next faculty, which exalts men above the inferior ranks. Volition and its

its connection with effects conſtitute all that power, or regency, of which intelligent beings are poſſeſſed.—We know, that to obtain the objects, and anſwer the end, which ſuit the taſte, many mediate effects, as means, are often neceſſary. Theſe are produced by voluntary exertions. Hence, without the faculty of will, men would be deſtitute of power, and be unable to obtain any end, or accompliſh any ſcheme whatſoever. Without this, he would not be a moral agent, or accountable for any of his actions. This faculty, therefore, is neceſſary in union with the others, to form a complete man; and has been the cauſe of all the great works and actions, which have been performed by men on the theatre of life.

THESE faculties united conſtitute a ſoul, which is a complete, natural image of the great Creator. Theſe are the faculties, or properties, in particular, which are of the greateſt value; and render man a being of higher rank, than any other being in this world; and capable of endleſs growth in knowledge, in goodneſs, and happineſs. Becauſe theſe render him capable of more ſublime enjoyments, and of promoting the higheſt good, to a greater degree than any other rank of exiſtence, below the angelic.

LET us now take a view of the beings which ſurround us, and aſcertain their rank in the gradations of exiſtence.

MERE matter, being devoid of all thoſe properties, which are neceſſary to enjoyment, has no value, only as a mean to promote it. In this relation, it is of great ſervice, and contributes much to the felicity of intelligent beings. But as it is not capable of any enjoyment, it takes the loweſt place in the grade of exiſtence.

ANIMAL beings are ſenſitive, capable ſubjects of pleaſure and pain, are alſo a mean of more good to ſociety, and, therefore, poſſeſs properties of higher value than mere matter. In theſe reſpects, being of greater dignity and worth, they occupy the next rank in the ſcale of exiſtence.

NEXT in the aſcent is man, who is capable, not only of the enjoyment, and increaſe of more happineſs in this life, than any other order of beings; but he is deſigned to be the ſubject, and the mean of increaſing happineſs and glory through an endleſs duration. He, therefore, ſuſtains the higheſt rank in this world, and is ſtationed but a little below the angelic orders; and, on account of his ſuperior dignity, is made lord of this lower creation. Indeed, the ſacred pages, and the analogy of the divine works, afford us reaſons to believe, that the diſtance between man and the loweſt order of angels, is nearly the ſame as the diſtance between man and the animal tribes. And the ſame reaſons may convince us, that the angels

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rise in ranks above each other, towards the throne of the Almighty. Hence, we read of the cherubims, the seraphims, of principalities, dominions, and powers, which terms denote the different ranks in the angelic world.

HAVING ascended, in taking a view of the rising ranks of existence, to God the supreme head, and king of the universe, let us stop, for a moment, and contemplate his infinite dignity and glory. He, not only enjoys an inexhaustible fountain of happiness in himself, but is possessed of all the attributes necessary to communicate and diffuse it to the utmost possible extent. God is the original fountain of all that is good, and of all that is valuable throughout the creation. It is on account of his infinite dignity and worth, that he does, and ought alone, to sustain the highest rank in the universe. All other ranks are derived from, and dependent on him. His will gave them existence; according to it they are governed, and will be disposed of for ever. In what exact order God has arranged his creatures, from the lowest to the highest. The lower ranks are subordinated to the higher; they are mutually dependent on, and subservient to the good of each other, and the greatest happiness of the moral system. All his works, through every rank, speak his existence, his universal presence, and agency, and, like a mirror, reflect to the view of rational creatures, his infinite glory. We are ranked so very far beneath Jehovah,

hovah, that when he looks down, through the angelic orders, on men, it is no matter of wonder to hear him ſay, the nations are as the drop of the bucket, and accounted as the ſmall duſt of the balance—all nations are, before him, as nothing, and leſs than nothing and vanity. Lord what is man, that thou art mindful of him? And are not we under every obligation to look up to God, and unite with the ſhining ranks around his throne, in their adoring proſtration at his foot-ſtool; and, with the higheſt joy, join in their conſtant anthem of praiſe, that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth?

All creatures riſe by nice gradations from the loweſt to the higheſt, and hereby diſplay the wiſdom of God. Hence, among the individuals of the ſame rank, ſome have leſs, and others greater value; ſo that the difference here is as great, as the difference between the greateſt in one, and the leaſt individual in another, through all the ſeveral ranks of created exiſtence. Hence no ſchaſms appear, for every ſpace is occupied by ſome creature of leſs or greater dignity and worth; and the individuals of every kind, and the ſeveral ranks, being linked together, form one ſtupenduous whole, which will iſſue, finally, in the higheſt poſſible increaſe and diffuſion of happineſs.

All that now remains, is, to apply the ſubject,

By

By ſhowing how the improvement of the mind will contribute to the good of ſociety.

We have taken into view the natural capacities of that ſpiritual exiſtence, called the ſoul of man. Theſe faculties improve with our growth in knowledge, goodneſs, and happineſs; and they have no value, except as they ſtand related to ſuch improvement. In this view, their value is equal to the importance of knowledge, of virtue, of the dignity and happineſs of ſociety. The inanimate creation has no capacity for improvement in knowledge, in virtue, or in happineſs; and the higheſt improvement of which animals are capable, is very limited. But man is made to grow and increaſe for ever: And his happineſs will increaſe, eſpecially hereafter, in proportion to his growth in knowledge and virtue. Without improving in theſe reſpects, the rank and dignity of man will be ſtationary. But by ſuch improvements he may exalt his rank, riſe in dignity and glory, until he exceeds in luſtre the brightneſs of the ſun.

To make it appear then, diſtinctly, what means are neceſſary to the improvement of the mind, and how ſuch improvement will contribute to the good of ſociety, let it be obſerved,

That every civil community, whether ſtate, kingdom, or empire, may be conſidered a political perſon. The legiſlative or ſupreme authority

authority is the head or ſoul of this perſon; and the ſeveral individuals, compoſing the community, are the members. Theſe members, with their head, conſtitute one entire political perſon. The legiſlative authority is the collective voice and will of the ſociety. And as the greateſt wiſdom in the community ought to reſide in the head, for this reaſon it ought to aſſign to each perſon his duty, and direct and govern, as far as is neceſſary, to the higheſt good of the whole body. In this view it is evident, that as every civil community is compoſed of a united collection of individuals, its real dignity and worth are in proportion to the dignity and worth of the perſons compoſing it. But as perſons increaſe in real value and dignity only by improving their minds, by ſuch improvement only can the true dignity and glory of any ſociety be increaſed. Therefore, whatever is neceſſary to their improvement, is neceſſary to the higheſt good and improvement of ſociety.

For further illuſtration, let it be enquired. Is not a ſociety proſperous and happy, in proportion as the members enjoy their rights, liberties, and privileges in peace, and ſafety? When they are neither diſturbed by internal broils, nor foreign wars, nor ſtand in fear of them? When the members, from a ſpirit of love, mutually diſcharge all the offices of kindneſs and friendſhip, and enjoy every neceſſary ſource of happineſs? But, how ſhall ſociety be advanced to a ſtate ſo deſirable; and what means

means are requiſite to accompliſh an end ſo important? What, but knowledge, can deviſe the neceſſary means? And what, but a virtuous diſpoſition, will prompt a perſon to ſeek, invariably, the good of ſociety? And what, but power, or voluntary exertions, can accompliſh the patriotic wiſhes of virtue? Surely, ſuch attributes are neceſſary to the higheſt good of ſociety. Otherwiſe, why do all men judge, that the rulers of a nation ought to be men eminent for knowledge, and virtue? And that power, in every community, is neceſſary to its happy exiſtence? Theſe are conſidered as neceſſary to qualify a perſon to govern well. By being poſſeſſed of knowledge, power, and goodneſs in perfection, Deity is qualified to govern the univerſe with unerring rectitude. And, in proportion, as the members of any civil body excel in theſe improvements, they approach towards perfection, and are qualified to advance the happineſs and glory of ſociety. And, it is evident, that a degree of that, which is neceſſary to make a good ruler, is neceſſary to conſtitute a good ſubject. How happy, were every one fit to govern. Then, whether he ſuſtains a private or public character, he would, invariably, ſeek by the beſt adapted means, the higheſt good of ſociety. And, were all the members, thus qualified, it would be impoſſible, that ſociety, with the common bleſſings of providence, ſhould not, alſo, enjoy the higheſt dignity and proſperity.

From theſe remarks, it is obvious, that the improvement

improvement of the mind is not only requiſite, but highly ſo, to the advancement of ſociety to any higher perfection than that already attained. Hence, as it is the profeſſed deſign of politicians to promote the happineſs of civil community, the improvement of the mind is one mean, without which, they can never fully reach their end. So far as ignorance and vice prevail among any people, ſo far thoſe errors and evils which violate their happineſs, and diſturb their repoſe, will prevail. Conſtitutions may be framed, laws enacted and executed, ſtill, theſe evils, while their ſources continue, will, in a greater or leſs degree, abound. Laws and conſtitutions are neceſſary, and may do much in reſtraining vice, and promoting the good of ſociety, yet, without the improvement of the mind, ſociety will not increaſe in dignity, or in happineſs. No object, therefore, which can claim the attention of politicians and legiſlators, is ſo important as the growth of the mind in knowledge and virtue.

However, to impreſs this idea more deeply on the mind, let us take a view of paſt ages, and ſee, how, by the cultivation of the mind, perſons, ſtates, and kingdoms, have exceeded the ignorant and vicious in luſtre and greatneſs.

Knowledge began at firſt to beam forth in Egypt. There the arts and ſciences were at firſt cultivated. From thence, like the aſcending

ſcending luminary, ſhe ſhone on the plains of Shinar, and diffuſed her beams through the ſtates of Greece and the republic of Rome. It was owing, in a great meaſure, to their ſuperior knowledge, that the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, ſo far ſurpaſſed in dignity and ſplendor, all the barbarous nations around them. And how did Europe emerge from darkneſs, and ſhine with ſuperior luſtre, by the revival of letters, in the ſixteenth century? And the States of America owe their ſuperiority, in point of dignity, above the ſavage tribes, to the cultivation of their minds in the arts and ſciences. Indeed, the fame of every nation is to be attributed more to a few men of eminent knowledge, than to all their kings and mighty conquerors.—Knowledge has made aſtoniſhing diſtinctions between man and man, and between nations and nations. The Newtons, the Lockes, and the Addiſons, appear like a ſuperior order of beings; and, by improvements in knowledge, do not ſome men in our land, as far exceed others, as the ſun exceeds the ſtars in brightneſs? Had it not been for men of learning, the fame of America would never have founded through the earth. Science and liberty mutually befriend each other. Thoſe conſtitutions, which ſecure the rights and liberties of men; thoſe laws which govern ſociety, owe their origin to men of knowledge. Men, by the improvement of the mind, have made diſcoveries in the heavens and in the earth, and in all the

works of God, which have illuminated the world; and taught us how we may convert the furniture of nature, to the uſe and benefit of ſociety. The neceſſity and utility of knowledge, to the happineſs of the world, are inconceivably great. And virtue, by which I mean true religion, is not leſs important. This has its ſeat in the taſte, or heart of men. She is a conſtant friend to man—to his rights, to his liberties, and to his everlaſting felicity. She is the brighteſt ornament, the moſt precious jewel, and moſt valuable crown of glory to man. Knowledge, when united with a vicious, inſtead of a virtuous diſpoſition, has been a means of more hurt than good, in every age of the world. It is owing to Satan's ſuperior knowledge, as one cauſe, that he has been able to found a kingdom in this world, and maintain his dominion over the ſons of men. His knowledge concerted the meaſures which his vile heart carried into execution, by ſeducing our firſt parents, and eſtabliſhing the reign of ſin through the earth. If Alexander had been ignorant of the military art, and of the means neceſſary to raiſe and equip an army, he could not have accompliſhed his ambitious views in conquering the world. Ignorance reſtrains and limits the operations of vice. But, knowledge opens to view a field for the depraved heart, like a violent ſtorm, to ſpread deſtruction far and near. Of this we have many inſtances.

The Cæſars, by their arts and intrigues, deprived

deprived Rome of her liberties, and reduced her to ſlavery. What may not be expected from an increaſe of light without virtue? Revolutions in favour of the rights of man may ſucceed, and the tree of liberty may be planted in various ſoils; yet the ſame light which diſcovers the way to demoliſh the thrones of deſpotiſm, and humble the proud tyrants of the earth, may enable the ambitious to deſtroy the temple of liberty, and erect in its ſtead the throne of tyranny. Where are the liberties of Sparta, of Athens, of Greece, and of Rome? If virtue had held an equal dominion with the light which illuminated Greece and Rome, the tree of liberty might have flouriſhed in thoſe countries to the preſent day. And, if the light of the preſent day ſhould enable the ambitious to deſtroy the liberties of America, ſuch an event would be no more extraordinary, than thoſe of a ſimilar nature which have been effected in the world. The influences of the ſun, however ſalutary in common, if rain be with-held, only ſerve to harden the earth, and deſtroy the ſources of life and happineſs. Light, without virtue, produces ſimilar effects in the moral world. Hence, without religion, the human race cannot reach a more exalted rank; but, by a retrograde motion, will ſink lower into diſgrace and miſery. Angels, ſtripped of the robe of virtue, became devils, and fell from the higheſt ſeats above, into the loweſt pit of darkneſs and ſhame. Where ſhall we find any

rank

rank of beings more worthleſs than they? they are viler than worms. Sin is, in like manner, a diſgrace to any people; but religion is their glory. This raiſed David from the humble employment of a ſhepherd, to the throne of Iſrael. This procured for Solomon that wiſdom, which extended his fame to the ends of the earth. This made Daniel greater than the wiſe men of Babylon. By this, man, ſimple as he is at preſent, may riſe to the higheſt glory in heaven. This is the ornament which adorns and dignifies human nature. It is the genius, the ſpirit, and the life of liberty. Unleſs we improve in virtue, our improvements in knowledge ſerve only to ſink us more ſwiftly and deeply into endleſs ſhame and darkneſs. As ignorance and vice will degrade perſons and nations, to a level with the moſt uncivilized and ſavage tribes in Africa; ſo when they are enlightened with the beams of ſcience and virtue, they riſe into reſpectability. As there is nothing to prevent their growing in greatneſs, ſince the field of knowledge is infinitely extended, they may proceed in a conſtant progreſſion for ever. By improvement, lower ranks may aſcend, till they reach an inconceivable height. By purſuing this path, we have reaſon to believe, from the pen of prophecy, that future nations will ſhine more bright than the luminary of heaven. For we read of a time, when all ſhall know the Lord from the leaſt to the greateſt; and when the light of one day, ſhall

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be as the light of ſeven. Theſe remarks are ſufficient to convince every perſon, how highly important the improvement of the mind is to the dignity and happineſs of ſociety.

But how ſhall the mind be thus improved? To this end, *education*, on one hand, and the *attention* and *application* of the mind, on the other, are requiſite. The mind, like ſeed ſown in a garden, needs cultivation to favour its growth. By the aſſiſtance of education, to bring into view thoſe things which ought to be known; and to give it a right direction in the purſuit of knowledge; and by a proper application of the mind to acquire it, it will daily enlarge its views—diſcover the nature and properties of the things by which it is ſurrounded—their connection and dependencies—their various uſes and deſigns, and their ultimate relation to the greateſt happineſs of the univerſe. The underſtanding, by ſuch cultivation and uſe, acquires greater penetration and readineſs, to diſcover the agreement and diſagreement of things, with their connections, relations, and deſigns. It acquires an habit of inveſtigating with eaſe, independence, and vigour; and every progreſſive ſtep facilitates future advances in the field of knowledge, and renders the walks of ſcience the more agreeable. By thus opening and expanding, the mind comes to feel its own ſtrength and dignity; riſes above uſeleſs amuſements, and ſcandalous vices, and ſoars aloft

loft in ſearch of new diſcoveries, which may promote the happineſs of ſociety.

But, with what branches of knowledge ought the mind to be more eſpecially acquainted? Man, in one age, cannot learn every thing. For this reaſon, we ought to acquaint ourſelves, more eſpecially, with thoſe branches of ſcience, which have the greateſt tendency to rectify the taſte—to promote the good of ſociety, and our own eternal felicity. But, of all the ſciences, *politics* and *divinity* will have the greateſt influence in anſwering theſe important purpoſes. The great deſign of politics, (by which I mean the whole ſyſtem of civil juriſprudence) is to concert and purſue thoſe meaſures, which will advance the higheſt good of ſociety. The whole ſyſtem of divinity has the ſame object in view, and, further, aims at the future bleſſedneſs of mankind.—It is true, ſome ſuppoſe, that theſe ſciences have no relation, or connection with each other. Such a ſuppoſition is attended with many ruinous effects. The fact, is, they are branches of moral philoſophy; founded on the ſame general principles; aim at the ſame object, and differ, only, in certain circumſtances. This will be evident from the following illuſtrations.

All intelligent beings form one great community, or kingdom, of which God is the ſupreme head. The greateſt happineſs of his kingdom,

kingdom, is the ultimate object which all his ſubjects ought to be pleaſed with, and invariably ſeek. Here is the origin of all moral obligation; for it is the higheſt good which binds and obligates moral agents. All the ſtates, kingdoms, and empires of this world, may be viewed as ſo many colonies, into which this univerſal kingdom of Jehovah is divided. Let us view theſe colonies as ſo many diſtinct political perſons; then we can as eaſily ſee the general principles which ought to govern them, as we can ſee the general principles by which individual perſons ought to be governed; for they ſtand in the ſame relation individual perſons do to each other, and the univerſe. Now, it is ſelf evident, that individual perſons ought to ſeek each others happineſs, to the extent of their abilities, and the higheſt good of thoſe bodies, of whatever denomination, to which they belong. To do this is right, and to do otherwiſe is wrong. Here, then, are two general principles, or laws, which neceſſarily involve each other; one of which binds us to ſeek the higheſt good of all individuals, and the other the good of all collective bodies. Alſo, when any perſon acts the part of an enemy to another, or to any collective body, and it becomes neceſſary to the good of the whole, that his good ſhould be relinquiſhed, and he be made the ſubject of puniſhment:—the principle juſt ſtated, which requires us to ſeek the higheſt good, obligates us to relinquiſh his good, and inflict puniſhment upon him.

THESE and the like are general principles, or the laws of nature, which all beings are ſeverally bound to obſerve; upon which the law of God, civil laws, and the laws of nations are founded. The great deſign of theſe laws, with the rewards annexed to them, is, to enforce obedience to the law of nature: For it is by obſerving the laws of nature, that the good of individuals, and the general good, are ſecured and promoted. Every act, which is injurious on the whole to happineſs in general, is a breach of the law of nature; and every act which aims at happineſs in general, is an act of obedience to it. Hence, theſe general principles are very extenſive: For they prohibit or require all thoſe acts of every kind, which ought to be prohibited or required by any of the laws either of God or of men. On theſe principles, the whole ſyſtems of politics and of divinity are founded. Their object is, likewiſe, the ſame: For they, unitedly, aim at general happineſs. Hence, thoſe greatly err, who view politics and divinity as wholly diſconnected. Hence, theſe ſciences not only contain the principles, but alſo all the duties which are neceſſary to our perſonal good, to the good of civil ſociety, and to the higheſt good of the moral ſyſtem. Therefore, of all branches of knowledge, none are of equal importance to be taught and well underſtood by the human race. Theſe preſent to view an unbounded field for mental improvement. Here is room for the mind to expand, and

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enlarge her acquaintance with the principles and duties which are the moſt conducive to the happineſs of the world. Here is room for the everlaſting improvement and gratification of a good reliſh of heart. Here is preſented to our view, the ſtrongeſt motives to perſuade us to make every poſſible exertion neceſſary to the good of ſociety, the glory of God, and increaſing good of his kingdom. Hence, it appears, that God has diſplayed his wiſdom and benevolence, in appointing an order of men, to teach us publicly, and weekly, thoſe principles and duties which are adapted to improve the mind, better the heart, regulate the conduct, and diffuſe light and happineſs through every order of men. And, as politics and divinity are built on the ſame original principles, include the ſame duties, and aim at the ſame object, in teaching one, the other is taught, in a greater or leſs degree. This mode of weekly education, inſtituted by God, is the beſt adapted to improve the minds and hearts of men, of any now in practice; and has more influence in regulating their lives and promoting the good of ſociety, than any other meaſures which have been adopted by the wiſeſt politicians of the earth. And the deſign of this benevolent inſtitution is more perfectly anſwered, in proportion as the miniſtry is filled with men of abilities, piety, and learning. Thoſe, therefore, who neglect this inſtitution, would do well to enquire, whether they act a friendly part towards the

improvement of the mind, the good of ſociety, or themſelves, or ſhow any ſuitable reverence to the Almighty? And thoſe, who deny the divinity of the ſcriptures, would do well to inquire ſoberly, whether they are not ſapping the foundation of politics and ſociety, and acting inconſiſtent with their political creed?

On the whole, is the improvement of the mind, an object of ſuch importance to increaſe the glory and dignity of man, and the dignity and happineſs of ſociety? Ought this to claim the attention of rulers, as the ſureſt way to anſwer the important deſigns of government?

Then we learn the importance of having every public ſtation filled with men the moſt eminent for virtue and wiſdom. Good abilities, extenſive knowledge and virtue, conſtitute true worth and merit. Thoſe who have more merit in theſe reſpects than others, are exalted in rank above them. They have riſen by merit. And, as public ſtations are places of eminence, men of the greateſt worth ought to fill them. They will fill them with dignity, utility, and honour. They will feel, more than others, the importance of having the mind improved in every uſeful qualification: they will attend to it, as the moſt neceſſary meaſure to promote the general good. When they are called by the ſuffrages of the freemen from their private walks, to fill ſuch ſeats of eminence, their regard for the public weal

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is the great motive which will induce them to obey, and engage in the arduous work aſſigned them. Such men never ſeek any public ſtation by intrigue. Every method of exalting themſelves, except by merit, to places of eminence, is beneath their notice. They deſpiſe all the low arts of intrigue, as mean and deſpicable. Such arts diſcover, by whomſoever practiſed, a little, mercenary mind, which aims not at the public good, or any thing higher than its own perſonal honour and emolument. Freemen may therefore know, that men who are intriguing for places of honour, are by no means qualified to fill them, and ought to be entirely neglected.

Our ſubject contains the ſtrongeſt motives to induce your Excellency to act with the higheſt dignity and firmneſs. Reflect on your rank by creation, at the head of all exiſtence in this world, and but a little below the angels.—— Reflect on the exalted ſtation you are called to fill, by the ſuffrages of the freemen; and how highly you are honoured by God and by men. —Look down, then, with a noble diſdain, on every thing which is beneath your ſtation and dignity, or which can ſtain your glory. Let all your conduct exhibit greatneſs of mind, a virtuous, patriotic ſpirit, increaſing dignity in your public ſtation and journey through life, that, when you aſcend to act on a more exalted theatre above, ſucceeding generations may riſe up and call you bleſſed.

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WITH his Excellency, the Council, and the Houſe of Repreſentatives, belong to the ſame created rank, and by the freemen are called to act in the ſtations which you now fill. Let your actions and profeſſions be as dignified as your rank and ſtations. What is worſe, or more degrading, than vice, and the profeſſion of ſentiments, which are ruinous to ſociety? Can you deſcend ſo low as to walk in the degrading paths of vice, and to be a ſervant to Satan, the prince of darkneſs? How would you deſpiſe a king, dreſt in his royal robes, to ſee him wallowing in the filth and mire of the ſtreets? Or to ſee him, neglecting the great concerns of his kingdom, for the ſake of ſpending his time with children in their amuſements, and playing with the glittering pebbles, which engage their attention? It is equally out of character, for any in a dignified rank or ſtation, to ſpend any part of his time in uſeleſs amuſements, or to ſtain his glory with the ſpots of wickedneſs. You are reſolved this ſhall not be; but that your conduct ſhall be as dignified as your ſtation. Reflect on the great and glorious work with which you are entruſted. The general good calls on you to concert meaſures—to reſtrain vice—to defend the rights of men—to have juſtice executed—to protect the virtuous and innocent—to nouriſh the arts and ſciences, and, by eſtabliſhing a proper mode of education, to diffuſe the beams of knowledge and virtue through every rank of citizens, and advance ſociety to the higheſt dignity and renown.

nown. What an amazing work! But, for your encouragement, take a review of thoſe men, who, by their great and virtuous deeds, have adorned human nature, obtained immortal honour, and are now ſhining in exalted ſeats in the paradiſe above.——Take a review of the great and virtuous deeds of Joſeph in Egypt —of Moſes, the leader of the hoſt of Iſrael from the houſe of bondage, to a land of liberty and plenty—of Joſhua, in his conqueſt of Canaan, and at the cloſe of his life—of David, who, by his religious eſtabliſhments, and by extending the kingdom of the Hebrews to the limits aſſigned by God, and other virtuous deeds, was ſtyled the ſervant of the Lord—of Solomon, who raiſed the kingdom of Iſrael to the higheſt ſummit of earthly glory, and whoſe fame for wiſdom founded through the world—of Paul, who diffuſed the light of the goſpel, and extended the conqueſts of the Redeemer from kingdom to kingdom, and perſuaded thouſands to aſſume their native dignity, and act like men. And why ſhould I detain you to review the deeds and characters of Abraham, of Samuel, of Daniel, and of others, eſpecially, the imitable and glorious deeds of Chriſt, the ſaviour of the world. Here are examples worthy of imitation. By performing deeds, as great and virtuous in your ſtations, as they did in theirs, you will leave your names to be immortalized, like theirs; and ſoon unite with them in ſervices more ſublime.—By an example as worthy of imitation, you may do

good

good, after you are dead : for example has amazing influence. For there is a great pronenefs in human nature to imitate, eſpecially, thoſe in ſtations of eminence. Hence, one reaſon why, in general, the things which are faſhionableſt among the great, as dreſs for inſtance, are imitated by the lower claſſes of people.

If improving the mind, practiſing virtue, and attending on religious inſtitutions were in faſhion with the leaders and fathers of the people, there is reaſon to believe, theſe things would more generally gain the attention of the lower claſſes ; and, if no more, greatly reſtrain the practice of vice. For vice and error will never prevail to any great degree, when out of faſhion with the great, and wholly diſcountenanced by them. — May your exertions, therefore, to exalt this riſing ſtate to the higheſt eminence in knowledge and virtue, be ſmiled upon and proſper. To this end, read more—read books, read the great volume of the divine works, grow in virtue, and outſhine the ſun in all its glory.

Finally, our ſubject preſents to the view of this audience, a univerſe compoſed of a vaſt gradation of beings: The ſeveral ranks connected, like the links of a chain, form one ſtupendous whole. At the head of this ſyſtem is the great Jehovah, who, by right of merit, ſways the ſceptre of univerſal government ; ultimately ſeeking the higheſt good of this great

community,

community, and ſubordinating all things to this end of higheſt value and importance. God has placed man but a little below the angels, at the head of every rank in this lower world, and given him dominion over the whole. Hence, all creatures in this lower world are his ſubjects, and, by ſubmitting to his dominion, adminiſter happineſs to every individual. As men compoſe one entire rank, they are by creation equal; one no greater than another, and each entitled to all the rights and prerogatives of men. They ought, therefore, to feel towards each other as brethren, and view each other as fellow-ſovereigns of the world—as the ſubjects of the Almighty—and as made to advance the greateſt happineſs of the univerſe. Among all the orders of being in this world, as far as our knowledge extends, man alone is made capable of endleſs growth and improvement.—And his improvemement depends on his conduct—on the uſe of his abilities—and the means and advantages with which he is highly privileged and diſtinguiſhed by his all-bountiful Creator. According to our conduct, we ſhall grow in dignity and worth, and ſhine with increaſing luſtre; or ſink into greater and greater ſhame, darkneſs, and miſery for ever.—Sin ſtains the glory, darkens the luſtre, and degrades the rank of every intelligent creature. While virtue or religion, connected with knowledge, is the brighteſt crown of glory, which dignifies us more and more, till we ſhall, through divine grace,

grace, be fixed as ſtars in the firmament above, to ſhine with increaſing everlaſting brightneſs. Science, and the religion which is taught us in the volumes of creation, of providence, and revelation, are the eternal friends and ſupporters of liberty; friends and ſervants to the growing greatneſs, and endleſs happineſs of man. While ignorance and vice degrade our rank, enſlave the mind, and conſtitute the foundation of every ſyſtem of tyranny. How many examples might be produced in ſupport of the preſent ſentiment. Witneſs the fall of angels. Look through the world, at Aſia, at Africa, at a great part of Europe and America, where vice, and in many kingdoms profound ignorance, have reigned triumphant; and what do we behold, but a world of ſlaves, and the uncontrouled ſway of tyranny and oppreſſion.

On the other hand, look at theſe United States enjoying their rights and liberties, founded at firſt by men too eminently religious to remain any longer in a land of ſlavery and oppreſſion. Liberty, exiled from Europe, croſſed the Atlantic with them, and fixed her ſtandard in this weſtern world. This ſhows, that religion is the genius, the life, and ſpirit of liberty, and the foundation of all true happineſs and greatneſs. By her aid, from ſmall beginnings, we have riſen into a growing empire. If we continue to cultivate ſcience and virtue, our land may become a paradiſe, and

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our nation, in ſome way, be inſtrumental in erecting the temple of liberty on the ruins of every throne of tyranny through the world. But if vice ſhould univerſally prevail, and religion be exiled, however the light of ſcience may increaſe, liberty will follow religion; and if they find no place to erect their ſtandard in this world, they will leave it to groan under the ſlavery and oppreſſions of vice, and reviſit their native ſkies.

Now then, the broad road which leads to ſlavery—to ſhame, and miſery, is before us; and the narrow way, which leads to greater freedom, to brighter ſcenes, to increaſing greatneſs, and future glories, is clearly preſented to our view. Let us riſe, then, and by cultivating ſcience, diſpel the clouds of ignorance and darkneſs, and, by virtuous lives, baniſh all vice from among us—Let us riſe ſuperior to the empty grandeurs and fading glories of this world, and purſue our journey after higher ranks before us, by ſwift advances in the improvement of the mind in knowledge, in virtue, and happineſs, for ever. Amen.

THE END